

## Water Tests Miss the Mark

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Many residents may have thought twice about filling their glass with town water after last week's mailing by the water department, but officials assure there should be no concerns.

Last week, the department mailed every Duxbury resident a notice indicating that the town did not monitor the public water supply system within specific parameters of the Department of Environmental Protection.

The DEP requires testing on a regular basis for specific contaminants to indicate whether or not the water supply meets health standards. During the last quarter of 2003, from October 1 to December 31, the town failed to collect such water samples.

According to acting Water and Sewer Superintendent Ernest Williams, the tests were conducted by his predecessor, Carl Hillstrom, one day earlier than they were supposed to.

"The testing quarter started on October 1 and the test was done on September 30 with the results being forwarded on October 8," said Williams. "I think Carl assumed these were eligible for the quarter so this is just a case of human error."

Hillstrom retired as superintendent earlier this month and Williams is taking his place until a permanent replacement is chosen later this spring.

Williams said the town received a notice of non-compliance from the DEP regarding the missed testing and is mandated to send notification to residents making them aware of the situation.

"We tested the water after this quarter was over, but we're required to send out the notices," said Williams. "The DEP does this with everyone and it is not rare, but we try to not have it happen."

Williams added that the tests are back on schedule and when the water department noticed the oversight, it tested the supply in February and again in March. He added that the entire department is working to improve overall efficiency and increase communication regarding future tests.

The specific test missed was for Trihalomethanes (THM), a compound formed when chlorine is added to water that contains specific organic elements. Because the town adds chlorine to the water system, they are required to test for THM being formed from this reaction.

Williams said citizens should not be concerned about their health, as levels of THM were well within the limits the DEP deems healthy, both before and after the quarter testing was conducted.

"If THM levels are high, they can be harmful, but you'd have to drink three liters a day for 70 years for it to be a danger," said Williams.

He added that the department has not received many calls regarding the notice from citizens, except from those "chemists in town" who understand water quality issues.